

Glastonbury Fayre

So, I finally got a gig at Glastonbury. The woman who had offered me the job was the mother of a friend of mine and she had assured me that accommodation would be provided and that she would give me a lift down in her car.

As we had gotten closer to the festival site the skies had grown progressively darker until, by the time we had negotiated security and managed to park the car, it was beginning to look like serious rain was on the way. We made our way through the festival grounds and found our place of work, a cafe just around the corner from the pyramid field called Chez Nous which was, by festival standards, an efficient and slick operation.

I was introduced to my boss. He offered me a choice of shifts and I opted for the early mornings, thinking it would give me a chance to enjoy the festival and see a few bands after work. My shift was going to be seven in the morning till three in the afternoon on each of the three days of the festival and I was going to be poaching eggs. Lots of eggs. I learned the drill; Get the water up to a decent simmer, add a little vinegar to keep the egg whites together, give it a swirl, crack the eggs in, and then fish em out when they were done. Seven eggs at a time. When there was a gap in the busy egg schedule, I was to help out wherever else I was needed. I think the money was pretty good for the time. Six pounds an hour or something plus as many eggs as you could eat.

It was the day before the festival started, so we had a little time to get settled in and so we made our way to the back of the cafe and found the little campsite where we were to pitch our tents. There was a fire pit in the middle and a makeshift shelter at the back to keep the wood dry. I slung my pack and helped my friend put her tent up.

When it was up it looked quite tragic. Bits of it sagged and flapped in the breeze and there was no flysheet, so if it was going to rain, it was going to rain in. I looked up at the ominous and bruised sky and decided against joining her in the tent for the evening, although she had offered it to me, and had said that if I really needed it I could sleep in it. I had gotten the feeling that she wasn't too keen, or that maybe that she was super keen and didn't want to tell me she was. Anyway, I declined the offer and opted to lay my sleeping bag out on two full coal sacks at the back of the makeshift wood store. It would make a lumpy bed but it seemed like the roof would keep the worst of the weather off and at least I wouldn't be sleeping on the ground in the teeth of the approaching storm in some sodden and disintegrating nylon nightmare with my friend's mother. I was carrying the good old British army sleeping bag that had been my main bed for the last few years and I had gotten pretty used to sleeping rough in it at this point in my career. The weather didn't really bother me too much and I was still young and fairly adaptable. I was thirty years old

As the light faded and night drew in, we all settled around the fire and made our peace with each other and with the world. Alcohol was consumed and joints were smoked to soften the ground and to ease us in our various minds. The atmosphere was genial and convivial, though unfortunately the same could not be said of the weather that was holding back but was still preparing for a display of unusual ferocity. For the moment, our merry band of itinerant chefs and bottle washers were comfortably joined in the circle of the fire and gradually, during the course of the evening, people straggled off to their various tents and camper vans to get some sleep before work. When the time came, I made my excuses and settled down on the coal sacks in my stinking sleeping bag. The last of our group were sitting about three feet away from

where I was sleeping but I slipped away to dreams easily enough through the last of the fire and the end of their laughter and tall stories.

Sometime during the night, the storm that had been threatening all afternoon, finally broke free. Great slaps and growls of thunder pushed and pulled and the sky was lit in ragged and flaming seconds. Rolling waves of rain swept in and crashed against the far reaches of the horizon. The water howled through. Sheets of it until you'd think there was no more left in the world and then, unbelievably, there was, as if someone was flinging down buckets of the stuff from just above us. Welts of it, a great whip of weather to send the animals jagged and make the birds wish they were fish again, coming down hard enough to flay any beast caught out. It was washing the vanities away, washing everything away, stretching from here to god knows where and god knows what it was going to make of us. It was a great biblical flushing of everything we'd tamely pegged and lashed, never dreaming a storm like it.

Rivers formed, and kicked and curled as the weather swept away what we thought we knew with a psychopath's disregard for the things it took. The click clack growling air, lightning shot, stabbed and flickered and showed the bones and skulls beneath our quaking flesh, as the breakers of the sky crashed and sucked back into themselves, resting only to gather force for the next onslaught. We were caught in a monumental coupling between the earth and the sky, rolled in the world's bed-sheets like bugs, and pounded with each thrust of its elemental desire. For once, despite the illusions we had been granted for the sake of our sanity and to ensure we didn't just weep and despair at the fragility of our lives, we understood our size and our place in it all. The sky flexed its great flanks and shook what it held as the hooves of that great storm galloped over the earth and everything on it shook with the

pounding.

Somehow, after the first fury had passed and it had settled down to a mere torrential downpour, I managed to get off to the land of nod for the last couple of counted and precious hours before work. I slept with the rattle of the rain on my makeshift shelter and with my mattress of coal keeping me just proud of the rivers and lakes I dreamt were rising around me.

I was woken, with a smile and a proffered cup of coffee by one of my workmates. I poked a tentative snout out of the hole in my sleeping bag and gradually emerged, blinking in the dawn. It was still raining and I wasn't even sure if I'd dreamt the storm.

"Here you go mate," he said, "here's a cup of coffee. Sleep well did you?" I managed a sleep furry thanks, and a rough affirmative that I had, indeed, slept.

"Bit of a fucking storm eh?" he continued with a laugh. "Reckon you were probably better under here than in a tent. I got fucking soaked." he laughed again. "Start work in half an hour alright? Should be pretty quiet today anyway." I thanked him, sat up in my bag, rolled a cigarette and watched the rain make itself at home.

It was Friday, the day when most people were due to arrive at the festival. After a couple of cups of coffee and more than a few cigarettes, I was mainly awake and ready to start work, so I trudged over the sodden ground to our little cafe on wheels. Nearly all of it hadn't been destroyed by the evening's theatrics and the other workers were busily preparing breakfast for the soon to arrive hordes of campers. I filled up my big steel pan with water and surveyed the ominous pile of eggs in front of me. There were hundreds and hundreds of them. I lit the burner on the stove and waited for the water to come to the to boil while I inspected one of the egg cartons. The box had a picture of some happy looking chickens pecking away in some cartoon farmland, although the box itself did not make any written claims for the well being of the

actual chickens involved in the process.

Obviously, even though I had a conscience about these things, I tried to ignore any thoughts I was having about the contentment of the chickens involved. I just got on with the job. The water was boiling, so I sloshed in a little vinegar, turned the heat down, gave the water a stir, and dashed in the misery eggs as quickly as I could crack them. After about three minutes they were looking like poached eggs and seemed completely un-miserable. I took them out, transferred them to a heated tray, started on the next batch and within fifteen minutes I had churned out a whole tray full of well poached eggs. Those battery hens would have been proud of me. I took the eggs over to the serving counter and presented them as though I had laid the fucking things myself. My boss was happy with the quality of my work, so I continued poaching eggs as the rain fell, and the world famous Glastonbury Fayre started to come to life. It was still pretty early.

It was still pretty early when I encountered my first rotten egg. As I was poaching at speed, I really had no time to check each and every egg for signs of possible corruption, so I had grabbed the bad one and cracked it into the pan before I had a chance to react. It crumbled, all bluey-black, and stinking like the devil's arse after an unholy night on the advocaat. I gagged as it joined its merry yellow and white brethren in the pan, leaving them irretrievably besmirched by its presence. One bad apple might not make a whole barrel bad, but one bad egg is the immediate end for a pan of poaching eggs. I held my breath, grabbed the whole stinking caboodle and ran with it to the bins outside, where I heaved the whole lot into the waste and moved away to a safe distance before I dared take another breath. Still retching, I rinsed the pan out and went back to my station.

Despite my subsequent efforts to scan the eggs for signs of obvious wrongness, this would happen every three or four hours

during the course of my shift and would provide the punctuation, by way of disgust, to what was otherwise an extremely boring job. The rotten eggs also served to provide me with a strongly adverse olfactory memory related to eggs in general, so that the reek of the bad ones somehow found its way into the smell of them all and by the end of my first shift I was beginning to find the smell and appearance of everything egg-like to be vaguely disgusting.

It hadn't stopped raining all morning, so by the time I had removed my apron and eaten a late and eggless breakfast, the lowland festival grounds that we were inhabiting had turned into a treacherous swamp and a maze of puddles and water traps where mud, in all its forms, was the undisputed king. There were huge pools of treacherous glop that could swallow a small dog or an unwary drunk with barely a whimper or a whispered goodbye. I surveyed the newly arriving festival-goers as they tried to adapt to their new and challenging environment. Victory of sorts, it seemed, could be achieved in the short term by managing to walk twenty metres without falling on your arse and I watched and learned as the implacable rain ran off my very waterproof poncho and dampened my less than waterproof trousers.

I wondered if there was any music or entertainment worth braving the outside world for, and what, on the poor sodden earth, could raise a body to forget its soaked and mud caked feet and raise its spirits beyond the leaden and unbroken clouds? Having no comfortable inside world as an available option certainly narrowed my choices as to whether I would go out or stay in, because I was out even when I was in. To be fair, it had stopped raining occasionally during the day, although in its stopping it merely seemed to be reinforcing the idea that it was never going to stop for very long. The stopped rain was merely a brief interlude that was only there to remind us how nice the weather was not going to be for the foreseeable future. We were there, and so was the

weather, and if we were going to moan about it, then we were going to spend a long time moaning. I sat on my bed and considered my next hopeful move.

Realistically, I had several hours of an extremely wet festival to negotiate before another night on the coalsacks and an early start at the simmering pan of the endless eggs. It would be an intolerably long time to sit on my damp arse and complain about it, so I resolved to get out and enjoy the festival to the best of my ability. I went and bought some weed, rolled a joint, and stepped into the mud for a paddle through humanity. It was actually quite amusing with the right eyes. Sometimes, the mire was only ankle deep and mostly the rain was erring on the light side of drizzle. Somehow, to me, the vast lakes of mud seemed like shining lagoons of chocolate pudding and I glopped through them, smiling and skipping like a village idiot on the first day of April, although it was, of course, mid summer and I, (like most idiots), fancied myself to be more than an idiot sometimes.

I had half a reason to be out and about in the festival anyway, I was sort of looking for a tent, although it has to be said that free tents are pretty hard to find on the first day of a big music festival where everybody is camping. After a long and soggy stroll, I was still tentless and I had resigned myself to another night in the wood shed as I made my way back to the campsite through the deepening gunge.

I might even have watched some bands on the way back but, as every professional knows, bands are a pretty much incidental background music to a true festival experience. I spent another night on the coalsacks. My workmates, who were working the later shifts than me, had stayed up late and more than once during the night I was woken up by pissed people looking for wood, so by the time I had to get up for work I suppose I had gotten about three hours fitful sleep and was feeling considerably less perky than I had been

on the morning of my first shift.

Somehow, I managed to stand sort of upright and poach eggs. It hadn't rained too much during the night but the new morning saw the downfall rise to new heights, as the heavens opened and more of the good old wet stuff fell out. It pissed it down, which didn't seem to stop people coming out to Chez nous for breakfast. They would turn up, all wide eyed and excited at eight o'clock in the morning, like people who thought sleep was the enemy and that cold monsoon conditions were absolutely perfect for a weekend in a field on drugs. I poached those eggs like a champ, feeling like I was keeping the chickens in their miserable business and that my sunny yolks and pristine whites would probably be the only clean thing that most of the campers would see all day. That is if they were still capable of seeing anything that actually existed.

As my shift was coming to a close, my boss approached and asked me if I would take a trip to the wholesale tent to get some supplies. He said that the weather was so bad that the delivery van hadn't managed to get through the mud. I started getting my poncho and boots on, and some kind soul suggested I might want to try out a pair of bin bag gators to keep the crap off my legs. This involved pulling two black bin bags over your socks, putting your boots on over them, and then fastening the top of the plastic around your calves with gaffer tape, which worked pretty well and certainly lent an apocalyptic chic to my already less than glamorous outfit. I set out into the festival and was met with a sight straight out of a very muddy version of the end of the world. If there had ever been a plague of mud in the bible it would have looked like that. It was as though the mud had developed consciousness and was making its first move towards its ultimate conquest of the human race.

I slithered along what had been a sort of track, and that was now an oozing and sluggish river of liquid soil that passed

between the various stalls and food vans, and through which the merry and mashed festival goers trooped and trekked in search of who knows what. The ground-level stallholders vainly tried to stem the implacable tide with whatever came readily to hand; haybales, bin bags, nappies, and unconscious revellers, were all piled up as barricades against the inevitable flood. I became convinced that this was mud with malevolent intent, or at least a sense of humour, as I watched a small tributary break away from the main flow and then make a deliberate left turn towards a nice tent selling tie dye tops and crystal pendants. This mischievous semi-liquid earth found a gap in the laughable haybale defences and bullied its way in, gurgling and chortling at the feeble efforts of the hippy stallholders to stop it. It was willfull stuff.

I was finding the situation increasingly amusing, despite, or maybe because of the ridiculous goings on, as I found the wholesale tent, pulled the dirty entrance flap to one side, and stepped into a river of brown water that was running straight through the middle of the inside of the tent. The man in charge was standing next to another man, who was holding an official looking clipboard and who seemed to be vaguely trying to maintain some semblance of order and official dignity, whilst putting little pencil crosses on his checklist of things that shouldn't happen in a food wholesalers tent. He had been sent by the local authorities to make sure that there were no infringements of food hygiene regulations and the situation in the tent was an affront to everything he was paid to make sure didn't happen. The actual river was flowing in somewhere at the back of the large tent and was then proceeding, with little respect for the law, beneath the various stacked goods and groceries until it made its exit out through the corner of the tent near the "door" I had just entered. I guessed that the river hadn't been there when they pitched the tent. We all surveyed the mainly soaked and ruined contents of the canvas warehouse. The

wholesaler just shrugged his shoulders.

"Can I have a bag of spuds please mate?" I ventured cheerfully, adding "You've got a river in your tent you know?" which made me laugh anyway.

The man in charge of the wettest warehouse in the world sold me a big bag of wet potatoes and went back to try and find a mutually acceptable outcome involving clipboard man, the safe storage of foodstuffs, and the unplanned river. I heaved the bag onto my shoulder, made my way over the stream, and stepped back out into the treacherous mud bath that was now serving as the main road of the festival. It was fucking ridiculous. By the time I made it back to Chez Nous, I was completely covered in mud, having fallen, potatoes and all into the soft embraces of the ground more than once. It didn't really matter because the mud was king, we were merely its humble servants and resistance was futile. I delivered the bag of emergency potatoes and made my way back out into the festival to see what else was going on.

This being the year before the big fences went up, the festival itself was a pleasing mixture of people from all levels of society. At this point in history, if you wanted to go to Glastonbury, you could, regardless of whether or not you had a credit card or money for a ticket. It was pretty easy to jump the fence or to give one of the volunteer security guards a tenner to ignore you as you slipped past and consequently you would hear accents from all over the British Isles and beyond and there was a pleasing sense of true anarchy about the place. This was a Britain that somehow got along without the traditional means of law enforcement. There were actual crimes I suppose but nothing too obvious or heinous. Maybe the occasional dishonest drug dealer would palm a handful of mixed kitchen herbs off on some unwitting novice and somebody might go through your tent to see if you were stupid enough to leave anything valuable in there while you were getting

lost in some far flung corner of a field somewhere, but I had been to the festival four times previously as a punter and I had never seen a violent crime or even a fight. Once, whilst I had been watching Bjork play a set in the mid-nineties, there had been a rumour of a shooting, and that information had passed among the tightly packed people like an electric current. The whole crowd had gotten skittish with the whispered news and had started behaving, en masse, like a spooked cow, as exaggerations conducted the surges and swells of the gathered mass of people. The reaction of the crowd had been certainly bovine; Crowd poison, never trust it. It turned out that someone had been shot in the finger with an air rifle which was hardly the crime of the century.

I am sure that bad and lawless things had gone on in the past, but in my experience they hadn't. It was a largely peaceful and self-regulating group of people, gathering at a farm in Somerset to listen to music, get wasted, and have a good time, although some people were there to make money of course. Me for instance.

There were Welsh boys selling mushrooms, Scousers selling pills, hippies selling acid, and wide boys from London selling weed, all going about their business fairly blatantly, and although some people who had never actually been there might have found it an insult to their ignorant sensibilities, nobody was forcing them to attend the festival were they? It's not like society fell apart or anything. Quite the opposite in fact. On paper it should have been a disaster, but here the only thing on paper was the acid and the little angry marks that the man from food hygiene had made on his checklist of things that must never happen to potatoes. It felt like a kind of freedom to me. Just live where you can, don't be a fucking dick, and try and have a nice time. What's hard to understand about that? Maybe some of the benevolent making substances actually helped us all to get along despite the

peculiar circumstances.

There had never been a disaster at the festival and it was a rare sight indeed to see any police at all, with the only coppers on site well aware that they were only there to be a slightly visible presence. Despite the fact that there was always a large uniformed corridor of police on the way in to the festival conducting stops and searches, once inside they seemed to know that they were not within their usual jurisdiction and that normal rules did not apply. I never saw anybody get arrested and the atmosphere, without the traditional enforcement of law, was largely benign. It was self-regulating, and self-policing. We got along just fine somehow. There were a couple of deaths each year, but then there were always a couple of births too, and as this was a crowd of over a hundred thousand people inhabiting a temporary city in a partial swamp in Somerset, the fact that people keeled over from natural causes, occasionally from stupidity, sometimes from bad luck, but never, (as far as I was aware), from evil intent, was to be expected. On this particular year I think the only deaths came, (it was whispered), from a particularly virulent strain of trench foot.

Anyway, nobody had died just yet that I could see, and if they had, they had already sunk beneath the implacable mud and were beyond help anyway. The way it was looking, we might all have been in danger of slipping beneath the mud and it was easy to imagine the whole festival being swallowed up with a gigantic slurp to be carried down into the depths of the earth where we would all live in the sunlit world of the Faeries forever, eternally young and blissfully unaware of our demise. I think by this point I was already partially away with the Faeries and I had put this strange occurrence down to either the lack of sleep, or some emerging brain problem related to the constant damp. Perhaps it was the confluence of leylines. It was getting hard to tell.

I trekked up the hill into the green fields because it seemed

to be a good idea to head for higher ground.

The anarchy was stronger and the weirdness was deeper up there, where there were yurts and tipis and benders and busses filled with full time freaks of every description. Lots of these people actually lived this life for real, and not as some sort of holiday from reality. The hippies, the freaks, and the travellers liked to inhabit the top fields and look down their noses a bit on the main stage and the people that gathered there. They called it Babylon, as though it was the root of all evil and that everything that was bad in the world sprang from there. All the big bands, glamour, shopping, and consumerism. Maybe they were partly right. I began to feel slightly guilty that I was poaching cruelty eggs in Babylon, though to be fair, some of the self righteous bastards in the top fields would make you feel bad if you were doing anything other than living off breath and sunshine (or your wealthy parents).

I wandered around the tipi field and took in the alternative living displays. I scurried past the animal cruelty stalls with their pictures of de-beaked and thoroughly miserable chickens and I drank herbal tea and smoked a lot of weed. Because it had stopped raining for ten minutes, and because we were on a hill, the ground here had firmed up to something slightly drier than deep swamp, and the mud was of a slightly different character. It had turned into a boot-sticking clag that clung to your feet like it loved you, so by the time you had walked more than fifty metres, each boot weighed about two kilos and there was little point in scraping the stuff off unless you wished to anger the soil God or spend most of the festival attending to your feet. It was best to keep walking and learn to live with the weight. I made it to the stone circle and looked down over the rain soaked festival grounds. Babylon looked a whole lot less like a fresh muddy hell from up there and the sounds of the various bands and the commotions of the festival joined into a pleasingly distant cacophony of sound, that drifted

and blew like smoke on the breeze. It was relatively peaceful up there and I sat and smoked for quite a while. I suppose I was pretty exhausted and stoned.

A wan beam of sunlight tried to break through the gloom, only to be banished forever by another squall of angry rain, so I took my poncho out of my day-sack and headed back down the hill to try and find some shelter. On the way, I passed through the tipi field and had a look round. The tipi field consisted of exactly what you might imagine. Lots of tipis. There was one tipi that wasn't inhabited. It was like a showroom tipi. An advertisement tipi. Somebody was obviously making and selling them, so I went inside and sheltered from the rain for a while, even taking off my boots and unwrapping my poor feet from their protective plastic wrapping. It felt great being in there; It was roomy, dry and thoroughly pleasant in comparison to the living conditions I had recently gotten used to. There was a little fire burning in the middle, so I sat inside on the hessian matting enjoying the first bit of comfort I had encountered in quite a while. A woman entered the tipi flap followed by about ten little kids and they all sat down and she started to tell them a story in a voice so sweet and melodious that I felt like my mother was telling me a bedtime story and I slipped off to the land of dreams for a blissful and unmeasured time. When I woke up, the woman and the kids were gone, but there were a couple of random stragglers left inside the tipi with me and I could hear the sound of a band in the near distance. I lay back on the soft and dry floor and listened to the music through the canvas wall. The band were performing a song about not dancing to techno anymore and they sounded like a cross between Hank Williams and Acid house, so I rolled another joint and listened to unlikely techno tales about being an exile on Coldharbour Lane through the canvas wall. I fell asleep again without really meaning to, and became conscious only when daylight

up my calves and tickling my thighs as I was taken by the music and weariness and began to drift into a dreamworld, where the music and the noise of the crowd joined into a lullaby. I closed my eyes, sank deeper into the soft earth and my own exhaustion. I was soon asleep on my feet, held up by the embrace of the mud and I only snapped back to the world when I started to fall, completely unaware of how long I had been gone. I laughed at the absurdity of the standing nap I had just taken, pulled my sunken boots out of the sucking ground and made my way back to the showroom tipi for a moment's comfort.

It is around point that the story begins to become a little hazy for me, as it veers between the mystical, the magical, the mundane and the downright ridiculous, and I am unsure myself exactly where the dividing lines might best be drawn. After a couple of hours in the tipi I made my way back up to the stone circle, which was filled and surrounded by other burnouts and chill seekers looking for a moments respite from the rigours of relentless fun. I slumped down with my back against one of the stones and looked out over the closing hours of 1997's Glastonbury Fayre, as the sun, all moonlike and pale, strained to make itself known through the low cloud and settled into the horizon as the smoke from the campfires smoothed its fingers through the low hills and the first points of lights appeared in the dusk. It all felt very ancient somehow, like some fantastic medieval city that had snuck through a gap in time to remember what it was for a minute. The distant laughter, screams of joy, and the faint traces of a thousand songs caught on the breeze, mingled and snaked up the hill towards us, as I settled into it all like a native and was once again lulled into the dreamworld through a combination of my own tiredness and the incantations of the festival.

When I woke up, it was fully dark, so I picked myself up

and wandered down into the green fields to find a drink, eventually settling upon a makeshift venue where an energetic punk band were thrashing out their non-hits with gusto and venom. The temporary bar was selling a particularly vicious cocktail of unknown origin and ingredients, and after three of those, I staggered out of the tent feeling considerably more pissed than I had been when I arrived. In this pleasant alcoholic fug, I wandered through the green lanes and winding mud paths between the dwellings, the canvas cafes and the momentary shops, occasionally poking my head into the strange tents and ramshackle arrangements offering various entertainments. There were bands and bards, jugglers, and freaks of every shape, shade and description. There were fire circles peopled by wizards and psychedelic pirates, crusties, witches, stray ravers and dogs, dropouts, druggies, moon-children, and earth mothers, all gathered in a little peace with a chance to forget the clanking world outside for a minute. I liked it. It wasn't everyone's cup of mushroom tea, but why should that matter? We weren't bothering anybody.

I wandered back up to the stone circle in my pleasant haze and found myself a space on the ground to lay my poncho down in order to keep my arse dry. Two women approached me and asked if they could sit on the poncho too, so I huddled over to the far edge and made room for them. We introduced ourselves and we asked if we'd all had a good time. It was going pretty well until the voices started.

"Will." the first one whispered over my shoulder from somewhere in the dark. I turned round and saw nobody, so putting it down to nothing in particular, I turned back to my new friends, only to hear another voice call my name again from a different direction. This time the voice was more insistent.

I was starting to get spooked, and as the voices continued to call my name, I strained and peered off into the dark in the various

directions that they seemed to be coming from.

"Are you alright mate?" one of my new friends asked me, noticing my concern.

"Yeah," I replied, "Can you hear that?"

"What?" she said.

"Nothing," I replied, peering over her shoulder to try and track the source of the latest voice.

We went back to our silence and the voices continued, until, slightly frantic but feeling like I had to take some sort of action, I stood up and shouted at nothing in particular.

"WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME!"

My new friends looked up at me as though I had gone completely mad, which may well have been the case.

Nothing answered back. "Will.Will.Will." with insistent and unplaceable tones, that were not particularly threatening but that were neither, by nature of their mysterious origin, reassuring.

"Sorry." I said to the two women who were both looking up at me in a concerned way. "I gotta go. Can I have my poncho back?"

They both stood up, and I grabbed the poncho and ran like a rabbit, away from the stone circle, through the hedges, over complaining bodies, and down the hill, all the way back to the relative safety of the tipi field. I ran pretty damn fast for a man who had drunk three weird cocktails and poached a thousand eggs.

Arriving at the tipi field, I headed over to small group of people who were sat around a fire in the middle of the field. I nodded my hellos, joined the circle, and listened intently to the darkness beyond the light, hoping to hear nothing more from the disembodied voices that had provoked me to flee. Mercifully, it seemed that I had left them up at the stone circle and there was only the sound of the conversational voices around the fire and of

somebody singing a soft song to keep the ghosts away. Silently thanking the world for music, I fell backwards, hit the ground with a soft thud, broke wind, and passed into a deep and peaceful slumber.

When I woke into the day, the people from the night before had vanished and there were only the remains of the fire and a few empty cans of beer for company. I stretched, pulled myself into a kneeling position, and found that I felt inexplicably like a dragon. I stretched my scaled back, flexed my tail, rolled a cigarette and breathed smoke into the pleasant morning. A few brave souls were pottering around outside their various resting places, making tea and trying to find what little life they had left themselves from the night before. A boy of around ten approached me, wearing a cape and a pointed hat. He was kicking his football in front of him and he had a wooden sword hanging from his belt. I turned to face him and squatted on my immense grey dragon haunches, ready for some unprovoked attack from this mini St. George. The boy kicked the football towards me.

"Do you want to play football?" he said.

"Only if you take the sword off." I replied, "They make me nervous."

I didn't explain why.

"You are too scared." he said, not taking his sword off and obviously unaware of the fact that I was actually a dragon.

I stood up and booted the ball into the near distance instead of reducing him to a pile of ash with my fiery breath.

"Maybe you are right," I shouted after him as he ran to get it, "but only scared people carry weapons."

We kicked the ball around for a while and then I thanked him for the game and went for a bumble round, as dragons do.

I wandered down the hill towards babylon, taking in the carnage of the end of the festival with my new found dragon eyes.

I have no explanation for the fact that I was feeling like a dragon, it had just happened and I had accepted it.

On the way down the hill I bumped into two of my colleagues from Chez Nous.

"Ahh. Hello Will, we have been looking for you. We've got your money!" they held out a stack of twenty pound notes. "How is it going?"

"Thanks," I said, taking the money, "It's been going pretty well thanks. I have found some new friends and I am going to share this money with them." They looked at me like I was mad, and perhaps I was. I hadn't even mentioned the dragon thing or the voices.

I was feeling pretty good and I didn't expect them to understand why I would want to give away my hard earned cash. Apart from the obvious fact that dragons have little need for pocket money, I think I was honestly feeling guilty about the poor battery hens that had provided the eggs that I had been poaching in order to make this money mine and it seemed that the best way to get rid of the guilt was to get rid of the money. Somebody had mentioned earlier in the weekend that I looked like a poacher, and I was feeling that, in a way, I had poached those pounds off those poor fucking chickens, so it had been playing on my mind and getting rid of the evidence seemed like the logical solution. They mentioned that my friends's Mum was leaving soon, and that if I wanted a lift home I'd better go down and see her. I thanked them both and headed towards Chez Nous.

The site was a mess. The weekend festival goers were starting to pack away their tents and belongings in preparation for the long walk back to their various realities and there was the air of a grim and fearsome hangover about the place that was blowing in like the weather at the start of the weekend and that was only just beginning to manifest its true ferocity. The drying mud was littered

to perfection, until you'd think that the fields were displaying the fruit for a bumper harvest of pointless waste: Plastic cups, shoes, clothes, cigarette butts, tents, people, and everything they'd thought they needed, were all half caught in the ground and caked in mud. It was a fantastic tapestry of abandoned debris and, viewed from afar, it was a pointilist masterpiece of consumerism. Up close it was not so hygienic. The wave of humanity had broken on these previously green fields, depositing great drifts of trash and treasure and it was kind of disgusting, like the end of a particularly wild house party. I waded through the piles of crap, kicking the piles of litter as though they were fallen leaves in autumn.

I made it down to Chez Nous, found my friend and told her that I was going to stay a while longer. I thanked her for her help, picked up my bigger rucksack, stuffed my daysack and sleeping bag into that, wished all of my workmates good luck, and headed back up to the green fields. I had no idea what I thought I was going to find up there. The festival was now officially closed but festivities were by no means over. Sure, there would be no star acts on the pyramid stage, and most of the food stalls would be shut, but that didn't mean it was game over. Monday was the beginning of the big clean up and the day when everyone who had worked at the festival over the weekend held a little after party.

I found a large tent and went inside and found it inhabited by a bunch of kids who had been camping at a site in Lyminge in Kent where there had been a campaign to save the forest from an imminent Centre Parc's holiday bubble. Inside the old army tent, people were distributing information about the woods they were trying to save and some of the protestors had been out scavenging stuff to take back to their campsite in Lyminge. A couple were slowly sorting through piles of tents and sleeping bags that had been left behind by revellers too baked or careless to carry their stuff home themselves. I got chatting and asked them if I could

leave my rucksack with them for a while. They seemed unbothered, so I slung my pack and sleeping bag in the corner and left with a dry pair of socks and my poncho in the daysack.

Outside the tent, a middle aged and weather-beaten man was frying eggs and a large mushroom in a pan. He had just arrived at the festival and told me, with great satisfaction, that he had found the mushrooms in a field on his way there. The eggs were bubbling merrily in the hot fat, and the mushroom was big and juicy. I suppose I hadn't really eaten anything for about twenty four hours and although he offered to share his food with me, I declined. He looked kind of hungry and it was still unsurprisingly easy for me to turn down eggs. I wished him luck, left him to enjoy his dinner and wandered over towards a couple of guys sitting on chairs next to a cardboard sign that was advertising Irish coffee for sale. They offered me a chair and proceeded to make a brew of instant coffee containing a good jolt of Irish whiskey.

We were soon joined by a small group of punks and I offered to buy them all a round of drinks as part of my plan to redistribute my wealth and exorcise the ghosts of the tormented chickens. They gratefully agreed to help me with my task and the two Irish vendors, as hungover and festival burnt as they were, set up the first round.

There was much loud talk of rebellion and revolution from our punk rock friends. We were all warming up, so I ordered another round for everyone and one of the Irish lads leaned over to me and whispered, "You know that these are just bullshitting don't you? Let em buy their own fucking drinks?"

I just smiled and said I knew that they probably weren't really that serious about revolution, but I was feeling flush and the money was burning a hole in my pocket. I didn't mention the chickens, or the voices, or the fact that I was still partially a big grey dragon.

We sat there and told a few stories and tolerated the rich

punks and their earnest and not very serious talk about smashing the system. Somewhere around the third coffee, when the whiskey bottle was down to its drips, one of the Irish lads leaned in, and with a conspiratorial whisper loud enough for all of us to hear, said, "Well, if you lot ever need any weapons for your revolution, we can sort you out with them alright." He turned round to me and winked and I tried not to laugh. Our young friends sat and thoughtfully considered the real possibility of machine guns and armed revolution. They went a bit quiet after that.

As I was sat, nursing the last of my coffee, I started hearing drums from up at the stone circle. Somebody was not giving up easily. They were giving the drums a real pounding, and the insistent and calling throb ebbed and phased in the breeze on its way down to where we were sitting. Now that all the bands had gone home and the main stages had shut down, the whole sound of the festival had changed shape.

The electricity was off which gave the whole place the feeling that we were going even further back in time, and there was a strange magnetism drawing me back to the scene of last night's mysterious voices.

Wishing my new friends good luck, I paid the tab, and headed off back up the hill to see what the commotion was all about. I was met by two African men playing Djembes in the centre of the circle. They were going hard, hammering out polyrhythms and slaps, polyglot paradiddles, pimp slaps, rim shots, five finger shuffles, and all sorts of rhythmic things that only drummers really understand. To be honest, I didn't know what they were doing, technically speaking, but it was making me feel good, so I rolled a joint, sparked it up, and passed it over to one of the drummers, while I lay back resting on my rucksack. At that moment, something miraculous happened; The clouds, which had maintained unbroken cover for the last hundred years or so, finally

parted.

The sun came out. The. Sun. Came. Out.

It was as though God herself had finally deigned to make an appearance on the main stage. I heard trumpets. I heard choirs of angels. I saw Jimi Hendrix himself, resplendent and bathed in purple light, playing a celestial guitar solo and setting the clouds on fire. I stood up, along with pretty much everybody else who was still capable of standing, and gave the sun a standing ovation. We whooped and cheered. Full grown humans shed real tears of relief as though we had finally been blessed for our long hours of sin and indulgent endurance. It really was quite beautiful. With a big smile on my face I started walking down the hill towards the sun. With every step I took, I felt lighter and lighter, until I realised that I probably wouldn't be needing everything I was carrying anymore. After all, we lived in a sunlit paradise where there was no need for possessions. John Lennon had asked me to imagine it but I was going to fucking DO IT. I took my rucksack off, had a rummage through it, and found what seemed to be so many heavy and pointless items inside that I tossed my useless waterproof poncho away. I became LIGHTER. I walked a little further down the hill and then I took my spare clothes and my clean, dry socks out and laid them on the ground in a neat pile.... I felt LIGHTER and LIGHTER. I felt like I was going to just float away until, after a few more steps, I realised I had no need for anything at all, so I discarded the last of my belongings and tossed the rucksack away. I had never felt as free and unencumbered in my life and I strolled off, whistling in the sunshine, without a care in the world, a change of underwear, a toothbrush, or my trusty waterproof poncho.

After wandering in a euphoric daze for an hour or so, I was surprised by the inevitable. It started to rain again. With my recent optimism about a sunny future, where nobody had to carry anything ever again, waning I realised that a waterproof jacket might actually be quite a good thing to have when it was raining even if you did have to carry the damn thing around with you.

I was, after all, stranded in a wet field in Somerset without a tent, so I retraced my steps more quickly than I had taken them and tried to find my rucksack and belongings, which proved to be more difficult than I had hoped. There was so much stuff in the field where I had gotten rid of my possessions that it was hard to tell one thing from another. The whole damn place was full of stuff and none of it appeared to be mine. Fortunately, there was lots of other stuff to be found. In fact there was stuff fucking everywhere.

I picked up a reasonably clean blanket and headed for the shelter of a tree near the stone circle to wait for the rain to pass. I sat on my haunches, with my back to the tree trunk, and watched the rain fall. I wasn't feeling quite as ecstatic as I had been when the sun had made its recent appearance but I was feeling pretty good. It was a soft rain and the shelter of the tree was keeping most of it from running down my neck.

After a while, the rain cleared up, the drummers came back, and a few brave souls gathered in the circle. Somebody was selling hash, so I bought three pieces, gave two away to some strangers who were sitting there, and told them to pass it around. They looked at me like I was mad, or rich, or something, but they still accepted it. One bedraggled camper was complaining about the festival he had voluntarily attended.

"What they do," he said, "is get all these bands to play and then they get us to sit around in the rain and mud, on drugs for three days, so we can listen to them, and then they charge us for the privilege."

I guessed that the weather had been getting to him a bit, so I passed him a joint and that seemed to make him feel a bit better about being so unfairly co-erced into trying to have a good time. I listened and watched and didn't say very much at all. I was still feeling a little bit like a dragon and I had no idea why. One man seemed to be involved in a theatrical production that nobody else was paying much attention to and he was running around the outside of the circle, shouting at the military helicopters that were occasionally passing over head.

"That's right you fuckers." he screamed at them, laughing wildly. "You should be fucking afraid! Look at us! One wink from my minds eye and you are going to fall right out of the SKY! HAHAAHAHAHAHAHA."

He was quite entertaining in a mischievous and faintly deranged impish way and although looking fairly non-descript and not being particularly big as such, he did look like he knew how to handle himself somehow. He seemed absolutely set on the idea of some sort of war. Sometimes ex-soldiers would end up living with the hippies after finding it hard to readjust to lonely civilian life after their long exposure to the army. We were tolerant people, we could deal with his weirdness as long he restrained any violent impulses and could satisfy himself with the psychodrama.

A witch was pouring tea and offered me a cup containing a few poppy heads, some bits of Kava, and several unidentified and presumably calming herbs. I took it with thanks and drank it. She seemed like a decent sort. A short while later, several of our group were snoozing peacefully on the ground under some umbrellas that somebody had thoughtfully picked out of the festival rubbish pile. When the rain started again, I rearranged the umbrellas over my sleeping friends to make sure they stayed dry and then retreated back to the comfort of the tree, where I slept peacefully sitting up with my back to the trunk, wrapped in my slightly damp blanket.

When I woke up, it was dark and I rejoined the circle, where about fifteen of us spent the night smoking various strange pipes filled with various plants and fungi.

The imp whirled and crackled around the edge of the fire and we ate the food that people had brought up to the stone circle for us.

We all slept in the circle that night and in the morning there were around seven of us left. It was grey and overcast, so I pulled my blanket around my shoulders to keep my little warmth in and we smoked some hash through a hollow carrot. The Imp had set a few little barricades around the stones in order to repel some real or imaginary invading force and though people would approach the circle, nobody would join us inside. We were a force field of weird. The litter pickers were still combing the grounds around us but the festival site was still strewn with everything that everybody had left behind and although the majority of the crowd had also left by this point, we were still hanging on in our strange little circle. We talked about the rubbish. It was harshing our collective mellow and spoiling the view, so after a brief discussion, we made a line of ourselves and moved around the circle like the hands of a clock, picking up every cigarette butt and every last scrap of discarded trash as we went. After an hour or so, the inside of the circle was spotlessly clean and stood out as a clear green spot in an ocean of plastic and discarded tents. It started to rain again and, even amongst our stalwart crew of freaks, tramps, and soap dodgers, there were a few audible groans.

"Maybe it's time to go home.", said a Barbadian rasta, "I ain't sure if I can take another night out here in the rain."

A Mexican wearing a damp rabbit fur suit nodded his head in agreement and The Imp shouted with joy and ran off down the hill screaming about helicopters. An agreement was reached. We had cleaned the circle, said our prayers and been beset by visions. It was time for a change of scenery. The witch packed away her magic

potion kit, the drummers put their Djembes in their cases ,and we all went to pack our tents and pack our belongings, agreeing to meet back in the circle before we left.

I headed off down the hill to find the tent where I had left my rucksack and found that the guardians of the forest had packed up and fucked off. I had lunched out my trusty rucksack and the sleeping bag that had been my only permanent home for the last five years. I shrugged and walked back up the hill wondering exactly how cold somebody would have to be to spend the night in a bag that had been my bed for a thousand nights and that had never been washed. I hoped it had found a good home.

I waited in the circle for my friends to gather. They arrived, carrying their possessions and I stood there with my slightly damp blanket, as a grey citroen 2CV slithered though the mud and rubbish up the hill towards us. It had one obviously flat tyre and came to a slippery stop outside the circle. The driver, remarkably, was our maniacal friend The Imp, who leapt out of the drivers seat and proudly cast a hand of introduction over his vehicle.

"Who wants a lift?" he yelled, triumphantly.

We politely declined and began our walk out of the circle.

As we made our way towards the entrance gate, the Imp pulled up alongside us and leaned out of his window.

"Shall we go to Glastonbury village for the night?" he said, "We can all spend the night on the Tor. It'll be great, people are gathering all over the country at special places on the leylines and maybe we can make contact. That'll show those bastards!"

He cackled and his eyes went in different directions.

"Have you got a vehicle?" he said to me, "You don't look like you do. Where's all your stuff?"

"I haven't got any stuff." I said, "Do you want some money?"

"Err No thanks. I've got some." he said, "Look, get in the car and I'll give you a lift to the village, it's a long walk."

The other members of our group said that they did have vehicles and that they were also going to the village, but that they had no space for me.

It looked like it was me and the Imp.

"Ok Imp." I said, wondering if this was my brightest idea, "But no crazy business alright?"

"Yeayeahyeahyea," he replied, "Don't worry. Get in."

So, I got into the Imp's little Citroen with its three good tyres, and we bumped off across the muddy field on our way to spend the night on Glastonbury Tor. When we got through the gates of the festival, he pulled the car off the track into an orchard.

"Right ... we've got to fix this tyre or the cops will get us." he said with a conspiratorial sideways glance.

I began to think that maybe he wasn't totally crazy because at least he had actually recognised that the tyre was flat and he did seem capable of driving. He changed the tyre while I wandered though the apple trees. It was refreshing to be in a place that hadn't been recently over-inhabited by humanity and there wasn't a plastic bottle in sight except for the one I was carrying.

I sat on a fallen log and watched him swatting imaginary enemies whilst having dramatic conversations with the air. Occasionally he would pause in his work to gesticulate at things that were beyond my understanding.

I was glad that I was still partially a dragon. I figured that if he tried anything too strange I could just reduce him to ash or something.

"Shut up Imp!", I shouted over to him, "Your obvious craziness is starting to make me jumpy!".

"ok ok ..", he muttered, "it's been a long weekend. Sorry".

With the car now running on all four tyres, we pulled out of the orchard and onto the road. We had finally made it back to civilization and the little car picked up speed as the Imp laughed

maniacally and glanced up at the rear view mirror.

"They know we're going!", he said triumphantly, "LOOK LOOK. They are behind us."

I turned around in my seat and looked at the large car that had pulled up behind us. It was a brightly painted and souped-up Trans Am and was not really the sort of car that I would have imagined a shadowy governmental organisation using for surveillance. The car swung out and aggressively overtook us on the small country road, slowing down briefly in front of us, before accelerating away with a roar.

"Fuck off!" shouted the Imp, beeping the pathetic horn of the little citroen at the disappearing vehicle in front, "You don't scare us! He's a fucking dragon!"

"What?" I said, because at this point I hadn't actually mentioned the dragon thing to anyone else.

"Nothing." he replied, calmly concentrating on the road and for once not noticeably conducting his ongoing battle with the phantoms of his imagination.

When we arrived at the village it was mid afternoon.

The Imp parked the car and we decided to take a little stroll through Glastonbury village, which although a fairly typical Somerset village in some respects, in others, wasn't. Glastonbury is a renowned spiritual centre for mystics, oddballs and post festival burn-outs who couldn't quite remember where they had parked the car in 1974: Joseph of Arimitheia had supposedly planted a hawthorn bush here when he had visited from the holy land on a little tour to spread the good news, King Arthur had an alleged holiday cottage in the area, it was the proud site of two holy and mysterious wells, (both red and white), and there was, of course, the peculiar Tor with its little castle on top. There was also the famous festival in a nearby swamp where people had consumed psychedelics of every description for a hundred years or more and

the place was supposedly on a leyline to boot. I don't know what any of this meant to me, but it did mean that on the Glastonbury village main street it was considerably easier to buy a healing crystal and a magic wand than it was to purchase an iced bun.

On this particular day there were a few scattered groups of festival refugees sitting in the sunshine, getting their collective heads together and it dawned on me that being back in civilisation and also being caked in a inch of mercifully drying mud might not be the ideal combination for us. There were people in the street who were not caked in mud. There were Nuns. There were people who **WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND**. I hadn't had a proper wash in about a week.

"Imp," I said, "We need to make ourselves more presentable if we are to have any chance of survival in this world.".

I guessed he would understand the need for camouflage.

"We need to bathe and we need some clean clothes. Let's go and find a cafe with a bathroom."

He nodded, and we set off in search of an establishment that might be welcoming to us in some small and lavatorial way. We found a nice little cake shop and, in some desperate imitation of normality, went inside. We were met by an old lady behind the counter who looked at us with an obvious amount of high suspicion. "Good afternoon gentlemen." she said, "What do you want?" There was no smile in her welcome. Thankfully, The Imp was managing to restrain his conversations with the other world, but he still wasn't making a great deal of sense to the human world either. Plus, he looked weird, even to me. So, optimistically imagining that I looked a bit better, I smiled reassuringly and took out my dirty wad of remaining cash. "We have money Madam, do not worry. Do you want some?" The Imp pushed my hand away and stepped up to the counter. "We'd like some cake and two cups of tea please." he said, "and we'd like to sit in the garden."

The news that we were not going to sit in the tearoom while we drank out tea and ate our cake seemed to relax the woman a little bit. "Very well," she said, "I shall bring it through to you."

I gave her some dirty money, which she accepted with something approaching gratitude, and we walked out into the garden and sat down. Mercifully, the toilets were situated next to the garden, so we would not need to defile the nice lady's tearoom with our presence any further. I went into the gents, locked the door and looked at myself in the mirror. The primitive creature that I saw looking back at me helped me to understand the less than warm welcome that we had received from the lady in the cafe. I was dirty, unpretty, and wild eyed.

After a good ten minutes scrubbing I began to look a bit less like a dweller from the mud caverns of yore and the nice lady's bathroom was starting to look a bit more like a mud cavern from the days of yore. I cleaned the sink up as well as I could and headed back out to The Imp, who was now making polite conversation with the cups of tea and the cake that the nice lady had left for us. She came out into the garden and disappeared into the gents, presumably to check that I hadn't left drugs or a stinking unflushed turd in there, and re-appeared again to give me a withering look, which I met with a fresh faced and beaming smile.

"Lovely cake madam." I said, "Bless you for that". She presented a thin and grimacing smile and went back into the cafe, leaving us to our cake and the sunshine.

"If you want to bless her you should say NAMASTE." I was reliably informed by my impish friend. I had no idea what namaste meant but I nodded and stretched out my pale grey wings to dry in the sun. I was feeling pretty good.

We left the café cleaner and slightly more in tune with our surroundings. Our faces and hands were somewhat clean but we

were still conspicuous in our dress. Thankfully, I had money and Glastonbury village had charity shops so, the little bell went ding-a-ling and we entered a pleasingly jumbled world of polyester shirts, old lady's hats, and ill fitting shoes. Charity shops have a peculiar smell somehow. It is not a bad smell, or a dirty smell, it is just a smell of ...charity shops.

I began rummaging through the discarded items on offer and the Imp started carrying on like it was the end of the world again. The woman behind the counter began to look a bit nervous, so I turned from the rack of shirts I was considering and shouted, "QUIET IMP! I AM TRYING TO CONCENTRATE. YOU ARE DISTURBING THIS PERSON. IF YOU CANNOT SHOP NICELY PLEASE LEAVE US IN PEACE."

He seemed to respond best to clear and simple orders. He knew I was a dragon so he wasn't about to start any of his carry on with me. The Imp looked at me impishly and then deciding against further performance, smiled, said sorry to the woman behind the counter, and left the shop.

"Sorry about my friend," I said to her.

"He is a little eccentric but he's harmless. We had a long weekend."

"That's ok," she said, calmly and charitably, "It's just that the village does attract some dark forces... at times, and occasionally it is hard to tell who is who." I looked at her undarkly and smiled. "I understand. Do you have any waistcoats. I have some money."

Having changed clothes in the shop, I emerged onto the streets of Glastonbury dressed entirely in grey, except for a fine brown seven button waistcoat that had a shimmering blue silk back panel. I was carrying my old clothes in a plastic bag and I had bought a clean shirt for The Imp.

"Imp, go and change your shirt," I told him, "and don't be giving that woman any more of your nonsense, she is not the enemy."

The imp changed, while I stood and smoked a cigarette feeling like

a new man. When he appeared from the shop we both seemed, (to the casual observer), like fairly well adjusted members of normal society despite the fact that I was a dragon and he was an Imp. We had washed, shopped, and changed clothes like normal people. We could cope with this reality and it would not crush us like bugs. Hopefully.

After a little promenade down the main street in our new-found finery, The Imp and I retired to a local hostelry for refreshment. We stayed in there for quite a long time, sipping tea, and listening to a singer playing Nick Drake songs on the acoustic guitar. It was warm and soothing inside and the establishment had actual upholstered seats. We were slowly acclimatising to the sudden shift in mental weather. The Imp had cut down on his theatrics and I was starting to feel less like a dragon.

"Pink moons's a gonna get you all. Pink. Pink. Pink. A pink moon", sang the singer and it was all totally believable somehow.

At some point during the evening we were joined by the Barbadian rasta and our friend in the rabbit skin suit. We greeted each other like old friends and settled in for the night, all agreeing to spend the night on the Tor that evening.

I left the bar with The imp and the Rasta, and we spotted our Mexican friend across the street, where he seemed to be involved in an altercation with another man who was obviously drunk and who was wearing a smart pair of trousers and a clean shirt. We could hear what the drunk was saying from our vantage point across the street.

"What are you doing walking round here dressed like THAT!" the drunk man shouted, sounding exasperated. "ITS NOT NORMAL!" He wasn't completely aggressive, but he was getting close. There was a little bit of finger pointing going on.

It was pretty ironic really, because our friend in the rabbit fur looked pretty fucking sharp actually, although admittedly, he did look unusual.

We crossed the road silently towards the impending fight.

"I mean, WHY DO YOU LOOK SO WEIRD !"

The drunk protestor continued, his voice rising unreasonably, "WHY CAN'T JUST YOU BE NORMAL?" Our friend in the rabbit fur stood silently in front of him as the three of us approached and stood in a semi-circle in front of the drunk and red faced man. It was pretty obvious who was the abnormal one now, and it wasn't us. Outnumbered by weirdness he became quiet. We weren't aggressive, quite the opposite in fact, we just stood around him emanating peaceful but determined vibrations. None of us spoke. We just stood there and looked at him silently until eventually he became quieter too.

"It's just that ... I don't understand it." he said after a few moments of our prevailing energy. "It's just ... Oh I don't know... I don't get it." He didn't realise that he didn't have to get it.

"I'm sorry," he said finally, with genuine contrition.

"I didn't mean it. Goodnight. I'm sorry." and with that he turned and wobbled off down the street and back to normality. I suppose we looked pretty frightening as a group, even though we weren't.

We didn't say anything between us about the incident but we parted company agreeing to meet up on the Tor that night. The Imp and me returned to his car to gather our things for another evening outside.

We sat in the car for a minute.

"Did you ever smoke DMT?" The Imp asked me.

"No." I replied.

"Do you want to try some?" he asked.

"No thanks." I said, having only just returned to my almost human form.

"I suppose a blowjob's out of the question then?" he said laughing, as if blowjobs and DMT were natural companions and I was the most boring dragon in the village.

"I am afraid it is out of the question Imp." I said, "Shall we go to the Tor?"

He cackled and grabbed his sleeping bag out of the back of the car while I collected my damp blanket and we headed for the hilltop, job unblown, and DMT unsmoked.

We made our way to the foot of the hill, and began to climb the steps that snaked around the steep incline. A few sheep baaed as we passed them, their dim outlines just visible on the dark and moonlit hillside.

Reaching the top we were met by the stark outline of the small, square, castle on the summit. There was an arched and open doorway on the facing side of the castle that lead straight through to another indential door on the other side with the clear night sky visible though both. The lights of the village were spread out like stars in the valley below and a small group of people were already gathered outside the building, playing drums, whistles and guitars. We greeted them, were greeted in return, and set about the business of communicating with other groups of people at different points on the leyline. Actually, I didn't attempt to communicate with anybody, after saying my hello's and spending a few minutes taking in the view, I crept off and made myself a bed on one of the stone benches in the little castle.

I hadn't slept laying down for a couple of nights, and the idea of a roof of some sort was quite welcome after a week of sleeping in a sodden field. I drifted off to sleep, accompanied by the sound of gentle invocations, complete gibberish, and bongo drums. The usual then.

I was woken in the morning, by the blustering tone of a Seargent Major type who was trying to get everybody to clear off his bloody hill and stop spoiling the view.

"Come on you lot," he said in his clipped and brisk tones, "You can't stay here forever. Cheddar Gorge is a few miles over that way.

Why don't you go and spend the night there?"

He didn't care where we went really, just so long as we went somewhere. Deciding that enough was probably enough anyway, I said goodbye to my friends, and walked down the hill into the village and found the main road that took me to the motorway. I hitchhiked from there back to Rugby, and when I arrived, I climbed under the gate that led to the little caravan where I lived and where the song thrush sat in a tree and sang every morning. On the lawn, growing right outside the door of the caravan, was a great big, fat, juicy field mushroom, just like the one the old traveller had been cooking back at the festival. I picked it, fried it up in butter, and ate it with no eggs. It was really good, and that night I slept on a real bed for the first time in quite a while.